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SUBJECT: SUCCESSFUL DOD BTRP NEGOTIATIONS IN ARMENIA

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Representatives of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visited Armenia October 27-29, 2008 to conduct final negotiations on the text for the Biological Threat Reduction Implementation Agreement. DoD negotiators met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES), including its Minister, Mher Shahgeldian. The meetings successfully resulted in a final agreed-upon text between DoD and Armenian representatives. The DoD team suggested that a signing ceremony take place in Washington immediately prior to the semi-annual meeting of the U.S.-Armenian Joint Task Force on Nov. 20, 2008, pending successful completion of internal coordination by the Government of Armenia (GOAM). The final English text and unofficial Armenian text were provided to MFA via diplomatic note on Oct. 30, 2008. The note also requested written notification that MES is authorized to sign the agreement. Upon signing, DoD, the US Embassy and MES will release press statements on the initiation of the Biological Threat Reduction Program (BTRP) in Armenia.

¶2. (SBU) Negotiations: The negotiations took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) during October 27-29, 2008. On the Armenian side, the MFA was represented by Artem Aznaurian, Counselor, Arms Control and International Security, and the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES), the executive agent designated by the Armenian government to coordinate the program, was represented by Major General Aram Tananian and Lieutenant Colonel Valeri Baghiyan.

¶3. (SBU) The MES representatives emphasized the importance of BTRP to Armenia and expressed their eagerness to work with the Ministries of Health and Agriculture to implement the agreement. Discussions focused primarily on the options for entry into force, equal cooperation, and rights of each side to evaluate the progress of

implementation. Each side expressed a willingness to work out their differences. DoD representatives pointed out that, as the FY2009 DoD Appropriations Act had passed, available funding for Armenia's BTRP had increased from \$5M to \$9M. On the third day of negotiations, all differences were resolved, and a final text for the implementing agreement was agreed upon by both sides. A final Armenian text was provided to the DoD team to be conformed to the English text in Washington.

¶4. (SBU) Signing the BTRIA: Different possibilities for signing the agreement were discussed. (NOTE: The official name of the BTRIA is the "Agreement Between the Ministry of Emergency Situations and the Department of Defense of the United States of America Concerning Cooperation in the Area of Prevention of Proliferation of Technology, Pathogens and Expertise that Could Be Used in the Development of Biological Weapons." END NOTE.) It was proposed that Arman Kirakossian, Armenia's Deputy Foreign Minister, sign the BTRIA in Washington immediately prior to the semi-annual US-Armenia Task Force meeting scheduled to be held on November 20, 2008, pending final review and approval by the GOAM. The MFA representative provided a copy of the Armenian law that explained the intergovernmental process for conclusion of international agreements. A copy of the approved DoD press

statement was provided to the GOAM, and the option for a joint press release with the U.S. Embassy upon signing of the agreement was discussed.

¶5. (SBU) Discussions at MES: The MES, represented by Major-General Aram Tananian, Deputy Head of the Armenian Rescue Service, hosted the DoD delegation for meetings on October 28 and 29. Tananian expressed that MES had previously focused on nuclear, chemical and radiological threats, and that its capacity to counter biological threats was lacking and needed significant development. DoD emphasized that early detection and reporting via increased laboratory diagnostic capability is vital to minimize both natural and deliberate disease outbreaks. For phase I of BTRP in Armenia, DoD proposed that one facility each in the Ministries of Health and Agriculture be designated as national labs, and their diagnostic and research capacities be upgraded. DoD will send a letter to MES officially requesting the designation of these two labs. As executive agent, MES will take the lead in internal coordination and work with DoD to identify Armenia's dangerous pathogen collections.

¶6. (SBU) The DoD team was invited to meet with the Minister of Emergency Situations, Mr. Mher Shahgeldian. The Minister emphasized the importance of working with DoD on developing a strategic relationship. DoD representatives briefed the Minister stated that he looked forward to working with other ministries to improve his country's biosafety, biosecurity, and disease surveillance capacities. He stated that MES is a new ministry, established in May 2008, and has several new initiatives to improve Armenia's crisis management capacity, including BTRP. The DoD delegation invited the Minister to Washington to take part in the signing ceremony for the implementing agreement or at a later date. He agreed in principle to a trip, schedule permitting. Lastly, it was discussed that DoD would work with the U.S. Embassy and MES to develop a joint press release pertaining to the signing of the implementing agreement.

¶7. (SBU) Meetings with U.S. Embassy: On October 28, DoD representatives briefed the Ambassador and her staff on BTRP and the outcome of the negotiations. To generate some positive media coverage on BTRP, the Ambassador recommended the Embassy issue a joint press release with the GOAM to announce the imminent launch of the BTRP, and a subsequent joint press release when the BTRIA is signed. With input from the Embassy, public affairs office finalized and released press guidance for use by the Embassy on Armenia's BTRP. It was also agreed that DoD would work with the U.S. Embassy and the Government of Armenia to issue a press release once the agreement was signed. DoD representatives raised the possibility of opening a Defense Threat Reduction Office at the Embassy in Yerevan as the demands of the program increase.

¶8. (U) DoD CTR Policy points of contact for this cable are Fay Peng, Fay.Peng@osd.mil, 703-696-7529 and Todd Baldwin, todd.baldwin.ctr@osd.mil, 703-696-7834. Program implementation points of contact are Armenia Country Manager CDR Matthew Rising, matthew.rising@dtra.mil, 703-767-0320 and Armenia Project Officer (contract support) Marcella Bertin, bertinm@saic-trsc.com, 703-822-8902. The Embassy's point of contact is political officer Dan Hastings, 374-10-494-302, hastingssdo@state.gov .

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